REGIONAL STUDY ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP COUNTRIES

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Partnership for Good Governance

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Regional study on women's political representation in the Eastern Partnership countries

Council of Europe handbook
for civil society organisations

Council of Europe

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Summary

The research has identified key facts and barriers that restrict women's political representation in the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

In all the countries women are less likely than men to stand for political office and to be elected both at legislative (national) level and at administrative (local) level.

Women hold less than 20% of seats in parliament in all the countries with the exception of Belarus where 30% of parliamentary seats are held by women.

An examination of the legal framework in each country shows that although there is a general legal basis for equality of women and men, in political life the reality is different. Where specific measures have been adopted they have not led to a substantial increase in women standing as candidates and getting elected, although there are signs of some progress. Lack of effective enforcement mechanisms weakens the very few specific measures in place.

However, stereotypical views and assumptions about the role women should play in society are major barriers to women's political representation in all the study countries. They affect women's position in the economy and the labour market, reducing women's likelihood of putting themselves forward as candidates, of being selected and of being elected.

Data from the United Nations Human Development Index and from the country researchers show that women participate in the labour market at lower levels than men and their estimated gross national income is less than that of men, from 77% of male income in Moldova to 50% of male income in Georgia.

Women are more likely to have higher education than men; however, they do not occupy positions in central administration at the same rates as men. They mainly work in occupations that are lower paid than men such as in the public sector.

The consequential lack of finance also plays a major role as a barrier to women, preventing or limiting their ability to stand as candidates or to run an effective campaign.

The study found evidence that the attitudes of citizens are changing in this regard.

The report has examined the role of political parties in supporting women's political representation and found, with few exceptions, that women do not play a major role in the policy-making bodies of parties and that women's issues and concerns are not visible in the policies and programmes presented to electors.

Nevertheless, there are examples of good practices, supportive measures and strategies, as well as recommendations, in some countries of the Eastern Partnership that could be adopted in the region to enhance women's political representation.

Introduction

REASONS FOR THE PROJECT

Gender equality is central to the protection of human rights and the functioning of democracy. It cannot be right that the experiences, skills and concerns of women are not fully represented or reflected in decision making about the laws and functioning of the societies in which they live.

International standards, such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the European Convention on Human Rights, are clear that women and men should have equal rights and opportunities to participate fully in all aspects of political life and the democratic process. The Council of Europe has reiterated this over a number of years in key conventions and through recommendations from the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Despite the recognition of formal equal political rights of women and men, participation in the political process, including membership of and participation in political parties, standing as a candidate, being elected and holding office with legislative or administrative bodies, remains dominated by men. The Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making noted that: "Men set political priorities, and political culture continues to be highly male orientated." The same situation exists still in 2016.

There remains a substantial under-representation of women as candidates and as elected representatives, at national and at regional and local levels, in the Eastern Partnership countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. There is also a lack of reliable, comparable official and non-official data on the situation of women in politics.

The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017 has as one of its strategic objectives the better implementation of Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making, and the European Commission Strategy for equality between women and men 2010-2015 encourages Eastern Partnership countries to promote gender equality through policy dialogue and exchanges of experience.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to provide a qualitative and quantitative assessment with regard to the situation of women's political representation in each of the EaP countries with a view to suggesting evidence-based policies and examples of successful practice that can be shared by all.

To achieve this aim, the study has looked at factors which hinder and which support women's participation in the political process from the perspective of two political decision-making levels: legislative (national parliaments) and administrative (local and regional self-government bodies).

AREAS FOR THE STUDY

The ability of women to take full advantage of their human rights and to participate fully in political life depends on the societal and legal situation in their country. In societies where women are generally unequal – legally, economically and culturally – they are more likely to be at a disadvantage in taking part in the electoral process and getting elected.

The study set out to examine the key factors, barriers or positive interventions that hinder or support women's participation at different points in their progress to become an elected representative at national (legislative) level or at local (administrative) level in the study countries.

These key points have been summarised[1] as:

► where eligible women aspire to stand for elected office;

► where those who aspire to office get selected as candidates;

► where candidates are successful in getting elected by voters.

The study has focused on three key areas:

► 1. women's place in society as measured by information on the economic, social and cultural situation in the countries;

► 2. the political context, particularly how political parties act as barriers or supporters to women standing as candidates and getting elected;

► 3. the legislative framework and the electoral systems that detail women's rights and how far they are realised.

REASONS FOR FOCUSING ON THESE SELECTED FACTORS

1. Economic, social and cultural factors

Women are affected by the prevailing cultural assumptions and stereotypical views of the distinct roles of women and men in society. Men are assumed to have primary responsibility for activities in the public sphere – economy and political life – and women have primary responsibility for the private sphere – home and family.

These stereotypes are used to justify and maintain historical relations of the power of men over women as well as sexist attitudes that are holding back the advancement

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1. Krook M.L. and Norris P. (2014), "Beyond quotas: strategies to promote gender equality in elected office", *Political Studies* 62, 1, pp. 2-20.

of women. The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017[2] has set the fight against gender stereotypes and sexism as its first priority.

Women who might consider standing as candidates have to overcome the stereotypes within themselves, within those who select them as candidates and among citizens who vote and might not see politics as the place for women.

In order to understand the impact of these factors on women in the study countries, information has been examined in the following areas.

▶ While women's participation in the labour market is not a direct correlation with their participation in political life, it is an indicator of their role in society. The study also looked at women's share of income in relation to that of men.

▶ The type of work women do affects their own perception of their capabilities to run for elected office and also the perception of their suitability by those who select them as candidates. The study covers university graduates, women working in central administration and, where possible, information on women working at management level.

▶ "The most pronounced expression of the uneven balance of power between women and men is violence against women, which is both a human rights violation and a major obstacle to gender equality".[3] The way violence against women is perpetrated is a clear indicator of how women are perceived in society. The study has looked at the evidence that is available on the prevalence of violence, whether there are laws punishing violence against women specifically and how effectively these laws are implemented.

▶ Active and effective NGOs focusing on women's equality issues can be important in bringing about and supporting change. They can act as a catalyst for change at legislative level and by promoting understanding and acceptance of the importance of women's equality they can change the perception of citizens. They can also provide a useful monitoring mechanism to ensure that existing policies are effective in their application and outcome. They can also play an important practical role in raising awareness and recruiting and training potential women candidates.

▶ Other pressures on society which may have an impact on women's political representation are: the existence of minority populations where, due to prevailing stereotypes, the position of women may be even more difficult than in the majority population, and the levels of migration out of the country.

▶ The study also looked at the role played by the media in reinforcing or challenging stereotypes in relation to women candidates.

▶ The study sought the views of women who had stood as candidates and had been successful in getting elected. It also sought the views of those who were not successful in both national and local elections to see how far they felt that stereotypical views played a part in their decision to stand, in the campaigns and when they were elected.

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2. Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017.
3. Ibid.

► The views of voters and their attitudes towards women candidates and political representatives are key indicators of change. Despite international evidence which shows that voters cast votes for women at equal or greater rates than for men,[4] those who select candidates are often influenced by a view that women will not be viable candidates.

2. Political factors

The role of political parties is crucial in the political representation of women. They are the gatekeepers for women who aspire to be candidates to move to being selected. They can act as barriers to prevent, or enablers to secure, an increase in women's political representation. Their role in the selection of candidates has been the focus of research such as that done by the United Nations Development Programme and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in 2011[5] which identified various good practices by political parties in encouraging women to stand as candidates and supporting them in campaigns. Some of these are included in the section "Supportive measures" (see Chapter 3) where those identified by the study researchers are also included.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life[6] suggests that they can support the political representation of women in a number of ways by:

► promoting and passing legislation, for example quotas that put in place measures to increase the number of women on candidate lists;

► adopting such arrangements voluntarily;

► promoting women to decision-making roles within their internal structures;

► promoting women's equality in their policies and in society as a whole;

► recognising women's issues and concerns in their party programmes;

► using positive images of women's political representatives in their campaigns and in the media;

► ensuring that the behaviour of their own members is in line with the values of equality and respect for women.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has set out a range of measures in its resolution on political parties and women's political representation.[7] These include:

► women in leadership roles within the party;

► women's organisations and their influence;

► women's issues in the manifesto/programme for the most recent election;

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4. Murray R., Krook M.L. and Opello K.A.R. (2012), "Why are gender quotas adopted?", *Political Research Quarterly* 65, 3, pp. 529-43.
5. United Nations Development Programme and National Democratic Institute (2011), "Empowering women for stronger political parties", UNDP and NDI, New York.
6. Available at: www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf.
7. Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 1898 (2012) "Political parties and women's political representation". Available at: http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19134&lang=en.

- ► women in the media in the last election;
- ► any arrangements to support women or encourage them to stand for election.

A further barrier to women is the cost of being selected as a candidate and fighting an election campaign. The IDEA Handbook on Funding of Political Parties and Election Campaigns[8] also suggests that the greatest difficulty is experienced by women candidates from new political parties or those not represented in parliament, who are often unable to access public funding. In this case women often have to finance the campaign themselves.

Women are more likely than men to work in the public sector such as in education and healthcare, and in the private sector in hotel and catering and in retail. As these sectors are not well paid, women are less likely to have savings that they can use to fund a campaign; and cultural norms indicate that women are less likely to raise funds on their own behalf and, if they do, to see that finance as belonging to the family.[9]

All these measures and the information provided by the researchers are the focus of the study.

3. Legal framework

The legal framework sets out the basis for establishing women's constitutional rights and freedoms, including the rights to participate equally in elections as candidates and voters and to hold electoral office. This includes looking at the international obligations that the study countries have accepted, as well as their national constitutions and any specific legislation that may impact positively or negatively on women.

The Venice Commission 2009 report on the impact of electoral systems on women's representation in politics[10] states that electoral systems have an effect on women's chances of being elected. List systems lead to more women being elected, and those that adopt enforced quotas of women in winnable positions on the lists are the most successful of all. The study examined the electoral systems for local and national elections to see if this is evidenced in the study countries.

In particular the study examines the success, or otherwise, of any systems of legislative quotas or affirmative actions which have been adopted in each of the countries for elections at both the legislative and administrative levels. The aim is to see what impact these measures have had in increasing the number of female political representatives, and what lessons can be drawn from their implementation.

Other issues that may impact on women putting themselves forward are the requirements for candidates to declare income and particularly the requirements for a financial deposit or registration fee, especially if these are to be met by the candidates themselves, as is the case for independent candidates not standing for a political party.

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8. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (2014), see Chapter 9: Ballington J. and Kahane M., "Women in politics: financing for gender equality", IDEA, Stockholm.
9. Ibid., p. 304.
10. Available at: www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2009)029-e.

Research[11] has shown that women are more likely to stand as candidates and to be elected at local, district level where there is less power, influence and financial reward than at national level, and the study looks at the evidence on this.

The working conditions of political institutions can also present women with problems. A global survey of members of parliaments found that women perceived the traditional working practices of parliaments to be problematic[12] and another study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2011[13] highlighted "work–life balance" issues as the greatest challenge when serving in parliament. The study explores how far parliaments and local and regional government institutions have addressed these issues.

The report has also identified supportive measures that have helped women to see themselves as potential candidates, to run successful campaigns and to fulfil their roles as elected representatives. The examples in the report are from the study countries and, where relevant, examples have been included from elsewhere.

11. Council of Europe (2009), "Parity democracy: a far cry from reality. Comparative study on the results of the first and second rounds of monitoring of the Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)3 on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision making. Strasbourg.
12. Ballington J. (2008), "Equality in politics", Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva.
13. Palmieri, S. (2011), "Gender-sensitive parliaments", Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva.